



THREAT POSED BY MOUNTING VIGILANTISM IN MEXICO

George W. Grayson

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George W. Grayson

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FOREWORD

Until the 1980s, Mexico enjoyed relative freedom from violence. Ruthless drug cartels existed, but they usually abided by informal rules of the game hammered out between several capos and representatives of the dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled the country in Tammany Hall-fashion from 1929 until the 1990s. Relying on bribes or *mordidas*, the desperados pursued their illicit activities with the connivance of authorities, frequently through ad hoc pacts that might last days, weeks, or months.

Criminal organizations sought protection from local police, regional or zonal military commanders, and sometimes directly from governors or their interlocutors. Just as in other forms of corruption that pervaded the nation authorities allocated *plazas*—areas where the criminals held sway to produce, store, or ship narcotics. The inequality of power ensured that drug barons also greased the palms of representatives of the federal government—with upfront payments of \$250,000 or more. Emissaries would forward a portion of the loot upward through the chain of command. In return, drug dealers behaved discretely, shunned high-tech weapons, deferred to public figures, spurned kidnapping, and even appeared with governors at their children’s weddings.

Unlike their Colombian counterparts, Mexico’s barons did not seek elective office. In addition, they did not sell drugs within the country, corrupt children, target innocent people, engage in kidnapping, or invade the turf or product line (marijuana, heroin, cocaine, etc.) of competitors. Each syndicate had its own geographic enclave, and if one lord sought to cross the

territory of another, he would first ask permission and, if granted, pay the appropriate “crossing fee.” Former Nuevo León Governor Sócrates Rizzo summed up the arrangement: “There was control, there was a strong State and a strong President and a strong Attorney General and iron control over the Army. More or less, the cartels were told: ‘You act here; you, over there; but don’t dare touch these places’.”¹

Tradition dictated that, should a conflict get out of hand in a municipality, the governor would call local officials on the carpet and, if needed, request that the military, or tough-as-nails agents of the Federal Judicial Police or the Federal Security Directorate repress the reprobates. If conditions remained the same or worsened, the state executive would receive a phone call from the Interior Ministry (*Gobernación*)—the PRI’s muscular political *consiglieri*—and sometimes even directly from within Los Pinos. The message was unequivocal: “Restore peace or pack your bags.”

Three key events in the 1980s and 1990s changed the “live and let live” ethos that enveloped illegal activities. Mexico became the new avenue for Andean cocaine shipped to the United States after the U.S. military and law-enforcement authorities sharply reduced its flow into Florida and other South Atlantic states. The North American Free Trade Agreement, which took effect on January 1, 1994, greatly increased economic activities throughout the continent. Dealers often moved cocaine and other drugs through Nuevo Laredo, El Paso, Tijuana, and other portals. The change in routes gave rise to Croesus-like profits for cocaine traffickers—a phenomenon that coincided with an upsurge of electoral victories by the National Action Party (PAN).

Leaders of this center-right party believed that winning fair elections—especially the presidency in 2000—invested them with legitimacy and ensured support from the citizenry. In their view, the PRI was responsible for every evil in the country—corruption, poverty, illiteracy, pollution, economic bottlenecks, vote-rigging, lawlessness, and drug trafficking. As a result, President Vicente Fox Quesada (2000-06) eschewed deal-making with the criminals even as he halted the practice of dispatching shadowy police forces from Mexico City to confront the ever-more affluent and brazen Mafiosi. He preferred better trained, better armed, and better equipped law enforcement agencies to combat the underworld groups. They not only lacked the muscle displayed by PRI janissaries, but they found themselves up against more powerful and deadly foes.

The situation deteriorated, and the worst violence since the early 19th-century revolution now afflicts Mexico. From December 1, 2006, when Felipe Calderón Hinojosa swore the presidential oath, through the first half of 2011, some 45,000 men, women, and children lost their lives at the hands of a dozen drug-trafficking syndicates. Extreme brutality has characterized many of the murders, including chopping off limbs, castrations, beheadings, and tossing victims into vats of acid.

Largely unexamined amid this narco-mayhem are vigilante activities. Rossana Reguillo Cruz, an activist who studies crime and violence at the Jesuit University of Guadalajara, has homed in on “community justice.” “This is not something that has always been around in Mexico. It is a new phenomenon that has been growing since 2000.”² In this monograph, George W. Grayson, an authority on Mexican affairs, exam-

ines the roots of vigilantism, the circumstances in which it occurs, its perpetrators and targets, and its linkages, if any, with the Calderón version of the war against drugs. His conclusions raise questions about whether there is a major upswing in so-called “community justice.”



DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
Strategic Studies Institute

ENDNOTES-FOREWORD

1. “Sócrates Rizzo admite ‘Narcopactos’ durante gobiernos priístas” (“Socrates Rizzo Admits ‘Narcopacts’ during PRI Governments”), *Milenio*, February 24, 2011.
2. Quoted in Ioan Grillo, “Vigilante Justice Spreads Across Mexico,” *Globalpost*, October 28, 2009, updated March 18, 2010.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GEORGE W. GRAYSON, the Class of 1938 Professor of Government at the College of William & Mary, has made more than 200 research trips to Latin America. He is a senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), an associate scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute, a board member of the Center for Immigration Studies, and a life member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Dr. Grayson lectures regularly at the U.S. Department of State, at the National Defense University, and at universities throughout the United States and Mexico. He served as a Democratic member of the Virginia state legislature for 27 years. He is a frequent commentator on CNN, National Public Radio, and NPR affiliated stations. In addition to preparing 24 books and monographs for CSIS, Dr. Grayson has written *La Familia Michoacana* (Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010), *Mexico: Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* (Transaction Publishers, Fall 2009), *Mexico's Struggle with Drugs and Thugs* (Foreign Policy Association, 2009), *Mexican Messiah* (Penn State University Press, 2007), *Mesías Mexicano* (Random House-Mondadori, 2006), *Mexico: the Changing of the Guard* (Foreign Policy Association, 2001), *Strange Bedfellows: NATO Marches East* (University Press of America, 1999), and *Mexico: From Corporatism to Pluralism?* (Harcourt Brace, 1998). His articles have appeared in the *Commonwealth Magazine*, the *Harvard International Review*, *ForeignPolicy.com*, *Foreign Policy*, *Orbis*, *World Affairs*, the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Globe and Mail*, the *Los Angeles*

les Times, *Newsday*, *Reforma* (Mexico City), the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the *Washington Post*, the *Washington Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. Dr. Grayson holds a Ph.D. from the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University and a J.D. from the College of William & Mary.

SUMMARY

On November 23, 2004, citizens in the impoverished Mexico City neighborhood of Tláhuac attacked three men who were ensconced in an unmarked car outside of the Popol Vuh primary school. Fearful that the strangers were seeking to molest the youngsters, a mob that quickly grew to 2,000 people dragged them from the vehicle, bound them, and began to beat them. Although badly injured, one of the presumed predators escaped. The other two were splashed with gasoline and set ablaze, killing them.

It turned out that the victims, who brandished their credentials, were federal detectives on the hunt for drug dealers attempting to corrupt the students. As television cameras and radio journalists disseminated the ghastly scene throughout the country, the officers' pathetic cries for assistance went unheeded until riot police turned up 3 hours and 35 minutes after the incident erupted. A squad of municipal police located less than a kilometer from the site of the vigilantism remained in their stationhouse.

The mayor and other public officials tried to cover up the debacle: One excuse was that guerrillas belonging to the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces had spearheaded the bloodshed; another explanation was that narrow streets and forbidding terrain prevented helicopters from landing at ground zero—even though choppers belonging to television networks managed to set down. Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who narrowly lost the 2006 presidential election, alluded to the inevitability of indigenous people, recent migrants to the capital, exercising traditional “uses and customs” (*“usos y costumbres”*), that is, taking the

law into their own hands. In one message, he said: “[I] t’s better not to get involved in the traditions and beliefs of [native] people.”¹

After the Tláhuac episode, the media began to highlight other cases of “lynchings” (“*linchamientos*”), a generic term for crowd violence against individuals suspected of committing criminal acts in their communities. “Vigilantes’ Fatal Fury in Mexico,” “Vigilante Justice Spreads across Mexico,” and “The More Deadly Side of Growing Vigilantism in Mexico”—these were captions of some of the media articles suggesting that so-called “rough justice” was surging in the country. The author reached the same conclusion, believing that President Felipe Calderón’s no-holds-barred war against cartels had contributed to an atmosphere propitious for citizens to take the law into their own hands. However, most reports are extrapolated from one or two *linchamientos* to argue that Mexico suffered from a tsunami of grassroots assaults on purported wrongdoers.

Little reliable systematic information existed on the number and circumstances of attacks, with several exceptions—Carlos M. Vilas, an Argentine scholar living in self-exile in Mexico had begun to collect and analyze data. Meanwhile, sociologist Raúl Rodríguez Guillén, a distinguished professor and researcher at Mexico City’s Autonomous University of Azcapotzalco followed in his footsteps. It is fortunate that Professor Rodríguez also edits *El Cotidiano*, an academic journal devoted to social problems. In various issues of the publication, Dr. Rodríguez and colleagues have explored vigilantism. Not only was he kind enough to share a collection of his writings, but he took time from an extremely busy schedule to provide invaluable guidance on the topic and to encourage the au-

thor to collect as many cases of so-called “rough justice” as possible.

Meanwhile, Dr. Luis de la Barreda Solórzano, director general of Mexico’s Citizens Institute for the Study of Insecurity, provided his astute insights into the causes of Tláhuac and other examples of otherwise docile individuals torturing, or even killing, purported criminals. He emphasized that these men (few women are involved) are offered no chance to answer the charges or appeal the ad hoc verdicts against them.

This monograph contains the author’s preliminary findings, some of the most important of which are that: (1) evidence fails to support the tsunami theory of *linchamientos*; (2) these actions more often take place in or near urban settings than in the countryside; (3) uses and customs seldom, if ever, account for attacks on perceived miscreants; (4) the conflict between the government and drug lords has not increased the number of lynchings; (5) in addition to revenge, “community justice” has a cathartic effect on mob members who may suffer poverty, joblessness, alcoholism, drug addiction, and broken homes; and (6) the anonymity of the attackers enables most to act with impunity against wrongdoers; the police and authorities may turn a blind eye to the attackers or even cooperate with them.

By adding to the number of cases identified, it is the author’s hope that this monograph will assist others who embark on research on one of the most fascinating subjects, both in Mexico and in scores of other countries.

ENDNOTE - SUMMARY

1. Quoted in “Usos y costumbres y Juárez” (“Uses and Customs and Juárez”), *Méjico Liberal*, May 15, 2006.

THREAT POSED BY MOUNTING VIGILANTISM IN MEXICO

INTRODUCTION

Areas of Mexico have deteriorated into blood-drenched killing fields as President Felipe Calderón, who took office on December 1, 2006, pursues warfare against eight or more deadly cartels, along with the gangs of young hoodlums who either cooperate with these crime syndicates or wreak mayhem on their own. Depictions of decapitations, castrations, brutal beatings, and other forms of torture garner newspaper headlines and lead stories on radio and television news reports. At times, the media appears to glorify drug kingpins, disseminating their propaganda and revealing information that could endanger anti-crime operations. Such publicity prompted the nation's largest news outlets to adopt reporting guidelines, stating that "we in the news media should condemn and reveal the violence arising from organized crime," while ignoring and rejecting "information coming from criminal groups with the purpose of propaganda."¹

Tales of violence fill *YouTube*, *Twitter*, and electronic mails. "Public space has been taken over by criminals, and [in the Northeast state of] Tamaulipas, society is at their mercy," Carlos Flores, a visiting professor at the University of Connecticut, told the *Wall Street Journal*.² While not challenging cartels and gangs, average citizens seem increasingly ready to take the law into their own hands—especially poor denizens of remote neighborhoods who feel abandoned by local law enforcement agencies and threatened by common criminals.

"With federal resources aimed at drug traffickers and local police more often a part of the problem than a part of the solution, vigilantes are stepping into the void. Suspected criminals who run afoul of these vigilantes endure the brunt of a skewed version of justice that enjoys a groundswell of support.³ Rossana Reguillo Cruz, an activist who studies crime and violence at the Jesuit University of Guadalajara, echoed this conclusion. "This is not something that has always been around in Mexico. It is a new phenomenon that has been growing since 2000."⁴ Meanwhile, in late 2009 security specialist Sylvia Longmire argued that: "Citizens are growing tired of drug-related violence, thievery, and other crimes—tired enough to take matters into their own hands."⁵

In this monograph, the author does not define vigilantism as acts that evoke images of sinister white-hooded Ku Klux Klansmen clamoring after terrified, sweating African-Americans to demonstrate their ugly sense of racial superiority. Rather, the Spanish term "*linchamiento*" or "lynching" will be used to describe situations typified when local residents spy a perceived wrongdoer committing a crime "*in fraganti*" in their neighborhood. Tolling church bells alert dozens, possibly hundreds, of citizens to the perceived danger. Although having no official law enforcement responsibility, the assembled group seizes the suspect, beats and tortures him, and may even administer the coup de grâce by burning, hanging, stoning, or mutilation in public. The perpetrators, who are so numerous and/or so geographically isolated, realize that they can administer punishment with impunity—in many instances because the police steer clear of acts of "community justice," lest they become targets of the mob's fury. Although often poor, individuals

in a mob may feel a sense of equality in carrying out their dark mission. This behavior, which somewhat resembles *Vigiles Urbani*, the night watchmen of Ancient Rome who fought fires and kept an eye out for thieves and runaway slaves, has been highlighted in literature by 17th-century Spanish playwright Lope de Vega. In this masterpiece, *Fuente Ovejuna*, the royal commander, Fernán Gómez de Guzmán, mistreated humble villagers of Fuenteovejuna. As a result, they joined together and killed their overlord. When King Ferdinand II of Aragon dispatched a magistrate to investigate, the townsmen, even when threatened by torture, responded only: “Fuenteovejuna did it.” In other words, when everyone is responsible, no one is responsible.

Such “rough justice” signifies a distressing retreat from civility. The apprehended individual cannot defend himself; indeed, he may be innocent, having ventured into the wrong place at the wrong time. Even if he has engaged in criminality, the penalty meted out is often grossly disproportional to the misdemeanor or felony. For instance, Mexican law does not permit capital punishment by legal authorities.

Mexican citizens have filled the capital’s main arteries to protest the violence besetting their country; in some northern towns like Ciudad Mier residents have abandoned their homes in search of safety; and they have shown their disdain for politicians in public-opinion surveys. All told, at least 120,000 people have fled—with the greatest exodus taking place in Chihuahua, Durango, Coahuila, and Veracruz.⁶ In the 1976 U.S. film, *The Network*, the main character, a broadcaster who has had a nervous breakdown, urged his audience to throw open their windows and scream into the streets: “I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take this anymore!” — a proposal that sparked

a cacophony of protest from angry viewers from coast to coast. Similar pent up frustration in Mexico has incited some men and women to take the law into their own hands—to track down delinquents, rough them up, inflict torture, and even extinguish their lives.

This monograph will (1) provide an overview of the violence sweeping Mexico; (2) examine the breakdown of traditional “Rules of the Game” that prevailed in government-cartel relations in the last century; (3) explore the inability of citizens to influence public officials; (4) describe several vigilante eruptions, including one that occurred in Mexico City’s Tláhuac neighborhood; (5) present data on trends in *linchamientos* in Mexico; (6) identify several groups that have organized to combat the drug cartels; and (7) suggest means to curb citizens’ resort to self-help measures.

OVERVIEW OF THE VIOLENCE SWEEPING MEXICO

In recent years, Mexico has suffered a stunning increase in violence, much of which springs from a war that President Calderón launched against drug cartels in late 2006. As presented in Figure 1, the number of deaths arising from this conflict reached 2,275 in 2007 before soaring to 11,583 in 2010—with 9,024 fatalities recorded through September 9, 2011. To raise money for their illegal pursuits, these criminal organizations have also resorted to kidnappings, which are estimated to have totaled 1,521 in 2009, 1,262 in 2010, and 837 through May 2011. For each abduction reported, four or five are not revealed to officials either because family and friends do not trust authorities or because they prefer to negotiate the release of the victim on their own.⁷

Year	Number of Murders	Year-by-year Increase
2011 (through September 9)	9,024	
2010	11,583	4,996
2009	6,587	1,380
2008	5,207	2,932
2007	2,275	155
2006	2,120	583
2005	1,537	233
2004	1,304	-61
2003	1,365	135
2002	1,230	150
2001	1,080	

Source: Office of the Attorney General, James C. McKinley, Jr., "With Beheadings Attacks, Drug Gangs Terrorize Mexico," *New York Times*, October 26, 2006; the newspaper *Reforma*, which publishes a weekly tally of murders in its "National" section; and Angélica Durán Martínez *et al.*, "Mid-year Report on Drug Violence in Mexico," San Diego, CA: Trans-Border Institute, University of San Diego, August 2010.

Figure 1. Drug-Related Deaths, 2001 through April 1, 2011.

Figure 2 shows the estimated number of kidnappings during the period 2000 to May 2011.

Year	No. of Kidnapping
2011 (through May)	837 (State attorneys general)
2010	1,262 (State prosecutors)
2009	1,521 (Seguridad en América); 1,125 + 50 cases in Oaxaca and Chihuahua (El Sistema Nacional de Seguiread Pública)
2008	1,028
2007	438 (Attorney General's Office); 6,600 (ICESI)
2006	595*
2005	325 (ICESI)
2004	334* **
2003	426* ** 362 (Attorney General's Office)
2002	433* **
2001	521* **
2000	601* **

Sources: Unless otherwise noted a single asterisk (*) indicates Instituto por la Seguridad y la Democracia, AC <http://www.insyde.org.mx/>; a double asterisk (**) denotes the Instituto Ciudadano de Estudios sobre la Inseguridad, AC or ICESI www.icesi.org.mx/icesi/index.asp; the 2008 figure comes from "Iguala 2008 a 1997 en plagios," *Reforma*, December 30, 2008; and the source for 2009 is Seguridad del secuestro en México, *Seguriad en américa*, June 30, 2010.

Figure 2. Estimated Number of Kidnappings, 2000-May 2011.

Mexico has achieved the dubious distinction of leading Latin America in the number of kidnappings – a crime second only to drug sales in generating income for criminal organizations. Barnard R. Thompson, an astute analyst of Latin American affairs, wrote:

No longer a cottage industry targeting the privileged few, today nearly everyone, rich to middle class to those of lesser means, faces the threat of kidnapping by organized gangs or the unorganized. Kidnapping for ransom is tailored to the victims, and if family or friends lag in paying even small amounts, they may be sent crudely amputated body parts as a sign of worse to come.⁸

Mr. Thompson made this analysis in mid-2004.⁹ Since then abductions have soared, possibly reaching 500 cases a month. Victims and their families report few of these crimes because of concern that the police may be accomplices. This felony falls into several categories:

- “Revenge” kidnapping – sometimes to gain the release of a cartel member seized by a competing criminal organization;
- “Express kidnappings” have also gained notoriety in Mexico’s murky underworld. Although the victims generally survive, these acts often begin when a passenger climbs into one of the tens of thousands of unauthorized or “pirate taxis” whose owners bribe officials in Mexico City and elsewhere in order to operate illegally. The driver, or his accomplice, whips out a knife or gun and demands credit cards, cash, jewelry, cellular phones, or immediate withdrawals from ATM accounts. Once the loot is obtained, they often release the traumatized victim. In addition, “[o]ne increasingly disturbing spin is that the criminals may contact your family and not release you until a hefty ransom is paid”;¹⁰
- “Bogus kidnapping” in which a criminal, claiming to have snatched a youngster, calls a parent at his office and commands that money be left

promptly at a specified location or the child will suffer the consequences;

- “Murder-kidnapping” in which the abductors sought to send a message to their foes such as in the 1985 abduction and killing of DEA undercover agent Enrique Camarena; and,
- “Money-raising” kidnapping involving the abduction of a member of an affluent family and demands of hundreds of thousands, even millions of dollars for his return.

The last type may explain the disappearance of former senator and presidential candidate Diego “Jefe Diego” Fernández de Cevallos. The immensely wealthy political lawyer went missing from his ranch in Querétaro, 100 miles north of Mexico City, on May 14, 2010. His family asked authorities to keep their hands off the case, so that they could reach an agreement on the ransom. Abductors posted a picture of the feisty 69-year-old former presidential candidate on *Twitter* in which he was seen blindfolded and bare-chested, holding an issue of *Proceso* magazine carrying his picture on the cover. The strategy worked inasmuch as Jefe Diego rolled up to his Mexico City home behind the wheel of his Mercedes Benz S0600 on December 21, 2010.¹¹

In a cruel irony, American anti-kidnapping specialist Felix Batista traveled to Torreón and Saltillo in Coahuila state on December 6, 2008, to make presentations to the local business community about kidnapping risks and prevention. The 55-year-old Cuban-American also met with law enforcement officials in connection with his efforts to negotiate the freedom of kidnap victim José Pilar Valdés, the former head of security for Grupo Industrial Saltillo and a contact of Batista’s in Coahuila. While answering a cell

phone call outside the acclaimed El Mesón Principal restaurant in Saltillo, six armed men heaved him into a white sport-utility vehicle and sped away. He is still missing. Batista consulted for the Houston-based ASI Global security firm, which “provides a portfolio of crisis management, prevention and pre-incident services to private clients and families, financial institutions and major corporations worldwide.” It identifies its “K&R” – kidnapping and ransom – consultants as having “the very best minds in the business.”¹²

CHANGING THE RULES OF THE GAME

Through the mid-1950s, the Mexican government boasted superior firepower over criminal organizations, whose operatives depended on handguns. But that did not matter. Relying on bribes or *mordidas*, the desperados pursued their illicit activities with the connivance of authorities, frequently through ad hoc pacts that might last days, weeks, or months. Loyal to the dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the armed forces bolstered the top-down control exercised by the state. Criminal organizations sought protection from local police, regional or zonal military commanders, and sometimes directly from governors or their representatives. Just as in other forms of corruption, authorities allocated *plazas* – areas where the gangs held sway to produce, store, or ship narcotics. Reportedly, they followed a “1-2-3 System”: a pay-off to authorities of \$1 million for an interior location; \$2 million for a coastal zone; and \$3 million for a U.S.-Mexico border crossing.¹³

Clashes among families or between traffickers and police happened in places such as “Mi Delirio,” “Montecarlo,” and other bars in Tierra Blanca, a rough-and-tumble neighborhood of Sinaloa’s sun-baked state

capital, Culiacán, a mecca for narco activities. The inequality of power ensured that drug barons also forked over *danegeld* to representatives of the federal government—with upfront payments of \$250,000 or more. Emissaries would forward a portion of the loot upward through the chain of command. Drug dealers behaved discretely, showed deference to public figures, spurned kidnapping, appeared with governors at their children’s weddings, and, although often allergic to politics, helped the hegemonic PRI discredit its opponents by linking them to narco-trafficking. Unlike Colombians, Mexico’s barons did not seek elective office. In addition, they did not sell drugs within the country, target innocent people, engage in decapitations, or invade the turf or product-line (marijuana, heroin, cocaine, etc.) of competitors.

As Professor Leo Zuckerman has emphasized, each syndicate had its own geographic enclave, and some had their own product lines. If one lord sought either to cross the territory of another or market his competitor’s substance, he would first ask permission and, if granted, pay the appropriate fee, known as the right of transit or *derecho de piso*. They would not attack the families of other cartel chiefs and, when they had to settle a score, they executed their enemy in a remote location or north of the Rio Grande. The Federal District (DF), Monterrey, and Guadalajara functioned as sanctuary cities where drug lords and their families could live free from revenge killings or other reprisals against each other. In 2011 only Mérida, on the Yucatán Peninsula, Querétaro, 135 miles north of the Federal District, and Mexico City had attributes of sanctuary cities.

Tradition dictated that should a conflict get out of hand in a municipality, the governor would call local officials on the carpet and, if needed, request that

the military or tough-as-nails agents of the Federal Judicial Police (PJF) or the Federal Security Directorate (DFS) repress the reprobates. If conditions remained the same or worsened, the state executive would receive a phone call from the Interior Ministry (Gobernación)—the revolutionary party's muscular political *consiglieri*—and sometimes even directly from within Los Pinos (the Mexican White House). The message was unequivocal: “Restore peace or pack your bags.”

The “no-reelection” article in the Mexican Constitution brought a new chief executive and his security entourage to power every 6 years. This provision sometimes changed the relative ascendancy—or even the ability to do business—of the cartels. The situation was sufficiently fluid so that should a local police or military unit refuse to cooperate with a cartel, the latter would simply transfer its operations to a nearby municipality where they could cinch the desired arrangement. Premier analyst Luis Rubio compares drug shipments to United Parcel Service delivery; namely, the Mexicans would pick up the merchandise from the seller and deliver it to the addressee. Above all, the nation’s PRI president and his underlings dictated the conduct of drug enterprises. Sócrates Rizzo, a former governor of Nuevo León, summed up the arrangement: “There was control, there was a strong State and a strong President and a strong Attorney General and iron control over the Army. More or less, the cartels were told: ‘You act here; you, over there; but don’t dare touch these places’.”¹⁴

The “live and let live” ethos that enveloped these activities began to change in the 1980s and 1990s when opportunities to make vast fortunes mushroomed because of changing routes for cocaine trafficking—a phenomenon that coincided with an upsurge in National Action Party (PAN) electoral victories. Leaders

of this center-right party believed that winning fair elections invested them with legitimacy and ensured support from the citizenry. In their view, the PRI was identified with every evil in the country – corruption, poverty, illiteracy, pollution, economic bottlenecks, vote-rigging, lawlessness, and drug trafficking.

As a consequence, PAN governors and mayors reorganized law enforcement agencies in their jurisdictions with the objective of firing bad cops and rendering better vetting, training, and compensation of newcomers to their forces. They sought to enable hometown officers to act with greater independence from the PJF and other federal agencies, longtime intermediaries between Mexico City and organized crime. “Consequently, local power fell outside the corruption network, a situation that facilitated more autonomous actions of traffickers, federal agents, local police, and corrupt officials, thereby increasing the probability of violent actions to impose new rules of the game,” according to Luis Astorga.¹⁵

The Church.

Even ranking clergy in the Roman Catholic Church, an ally of Calderón’s PAN, have shown sympathy for the kingpins. In 1997, Raúl Soto Vázquez, canon of the Basilica of Guadalupe, raised eyebrows in a homily when he suggested that more Mexicans should follow the example of kingpins Rafael Caro Quintero and Amado Carrillo Fuentes who had made offerings of millions of pesos.¹⁶ When politicians alleged that the cleric was stamping his approval on drug activities, the Church’s first response was that it was the duty of authorities, not religious organizations, to investigate the origin of funds placed in its coffers. Father Alberto Athié, executive secretary of the Social Pas-

toral Committee of the Episcopate, affirmed that the hierarchy does not accept donations from the “culture of death,” and that the government was free to audit its accounts.¹⁷

Church-narco ties had previously elicited attention in the 1990s when photographs were published of Amado Carrillo Fuentes visiting the Holy Land in the company of Father Ernesto Álvarez Valenzuela of Culiacán and Father Benjamín Olivas. Álvarez Valenzuela justified his action as a token of appreciation for the drug baron’s generosity to the Ciudad de los Niños (City of Children), an orphanage in the Sinaloa state capital. The bishop of Aguascalientes, Ramón Godínez Flores, has developed a latter-day theory of medieval alchemy; namely, that ill-gotten funds contributed for the Church’s social mission can magically be transmuted into legitimate resources.¹⁸

Carlos Aguiar Retes, bishop of Texcoco and president of the Mexican Episcopal Conference, raised the possibility that the government recruit as “counterspies” narco-traffickers who confess their sins and abandon wayward lives in order to gather intelligence about cartels. “They are very generous with the people in their communities, and in general they install electricity, telecommunications, highways, and roads, paid for by them,” Aguiar Retes affirmed. The narcos should be afforded a way of starting a new life through a witness protection program similar to the one in Colombia, he suggested. He also cited the example of Colombia, where guerrillas who had deserted the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) assisted in the rescue of former presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt.¹⁹

The Church received another black eye when it was found that Heriberto Lazcano, the co-leader of

the sadistic Los Zetas crime syndicate, had provided manpower and funds to construct the San Juan de los Lagos chapel in the El Tezontle neighborhood of Pachuca, Hidalgo. It appears that the killer's mother procured the contribution, and a plaque on the small building recognizes her son's generosity.²⁰

In some states, members of the Church hierarchy have refused to condemn—and have even justified—attacks on Protestants. For instance, José Guadalupe Barragán Oliva, spokesman for the Archdiocese of Oaxaca, defended indigenous Catholics for attacking 70 evangelicals in the Ixtlán municipality of his state. He called the assault “legitimate” in as much as Protestant “sects” fail to practice the majoritarian faith and “divide communities.” First, they “enter the community and then they leave crying . . .” he asserted.²¹ The Church’s permissiveness toward cartel leaders and Catholic vigilantes makes it even more difficult to establish professional law-enforcement agencies.

The Police.

Mexican rulers have never created honest, effective police forces. Porfirio Díaz, the dictator who ran the country from 1876 to the outbreak of a bloody revolution in 1910, used a Praetorian Guard—the deadly Rurales—to maintain order and attack his foes. The PRI, whose forerunner sprang to life in 1929, fashioned scores of law enforcement agencies distinguished by their corruption, brutality, and service to the self-described “revolutionary party.”

Upon assuming office in 2006, President Calderón found that the several federal police forces proved ineffective against narcotics syndicates. In some instances, they were on the payroll of narco-traffickers, many of whom had previously worked in law enforcement.

In other situations, they were outgunned by elements of the underworld, which had access to better training and superior weapons. In most cases, their reputation for venality, wrongdoing, and a lack of professionalism made the police anathema to average citizens. Their public approval, which was traditionally low, has declined even more during the drug war. The government's efforts to create a modern, competent, national police agency—similar to the *Carabineros* in Chile or the National Guard in Spain—slammed into an unyielding wall of opposition from members of Congress, most state governors, the military, and other important actors.

On a daily basis, newspapers and the electronic media expose wrongdoing by police. On June 25, 2007, a few months after assuming his position, Genaro García Luna, head of the Ministry of Public Security (SSP), purged 284 commanders from the top ranks of Mexico's federal police forces. The nation's top cop announced the demotion and retraining of chiefs in all 32 states; an unspecified number of these senior officers allegedly had taken bribes. He replaced the commanders with officers from an elite corps who had undergone careful vetting, drug tests, lie-detector examinations, and special training. "We know Mexicans demand an honest, clean, and trustworthy police," García Luna emphasized. "It's obvious there are mafias that are acting to keep the situation from changing, to continue enriching themselves through corruption and crime."²²

A Calderón initiative included the opening of a modern police academy in the city of San Luis Potosí on October 15, 2007, with generous assistance from the U.S. Government. The President inaugurated the facility, which features a rigorous curriculum in "vanguard" crime-fighting technology and leader-

ship skills—with emphasis on human rights and civic responsibility. Here, instructors teach state-of-the-art law enforcement methods to carefully selected men and women. Although its graduates receive attractive compensation, the sordid and worsening reputation of law enforcement personnel poses a major obstacle to attracting young, middle class applicants. After outlining the advantages of a career in law-enforcement to preparatory school students, no one came forward to apply. “They look upon policemen not as professionals but as strange creatures, as Martians,” lamented García Luna.²³ As revealed in Figure 3, the public’s “average confidence” in the police has deteriorated during the Calderón administration—from 6.3 (on a scale of 10) in February 2007 to 5.9 in January 2010.

Rank	Institution	Percent	High Confidence			Average Degree of Confidence		
		Jan. 2009	Jan. 2010	Variation	Feb. 2007	Jan. 2009	Jan. 2010	Variation— 2009-10
1	Church	42.0	41.2	-0.8	8.2	7.8	7.7	-0.1
2	Universities	34.9	31.8	-3.1	8.2	7.9	7.7	-0.2
3	Army	41.0	34.4	-6.6	8.0	7.9	7.6	-0.3
4	Mass Media	26.6	25.2	-1.4	7.3	7.6	7.5	-0.1
5	Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)	22.2	19.6	-2.6	7.1	7.2	6.9	-0.3
6	National Supreme Court of Justice (SCJN)	19.0	18.6	-0.4	6.7	7.0	6.9	-0.3
7	Business Community	12.1	14.8	2.7	6.0	6.8	6.8	0.0
8	President	18.0	16.3	-1.7	6.8	7.1	6.7	-0.4
9	Banks	12.6	14.1	1.5	6.9	6.7	6.7	0.0
10	Senators	6.2	7.6	1.4	5.6	6.1	6.0	-0.1
11	Labor Unions	5.5	6.9	1.4	6.2	5.8	5.9	0.1
12	Police	7.8	8.6	0.8	6.3	5.9	5.9	0.0
13	Deputies	5.9	6.2	0.3	5.4	5.8	5.7	-0.1
14	Political Parties	5.1	5.6	0.5	5.6	5.7	5.7	0.0

Source: Consulta Mitofsky, "Confianza en las Instituciones: Evaluación Nacional," January 2010; Consulta Mitofsky, "Confianza en las Instituciones: Encuesta Nacional en Viviendas," February 2007.

Figure 3. Index of Confidence in Mexican Institutions.

Other specialized courses take place in Mexico City. No matter how well intended, professional training runs afoul of bureaucratic obstacles. On January 31, 2009, some 350 cadets who completed 12 months of training by the Federal Police found themselves with neither an assignment nor a salary. Of the program, designed to prepare elements to restore public

order when mob violence occurred, a participant said: "It was a waste of time. We never had the basic law enforcement training necessary. . . . We showed up and listened to speeches from people who supposedly were qualified, but who were not accredited."²⁴

What have been the over-all results of this modernization effort? Scarcely 3 years later, the Mexican government fired an additional 3,200 federal police, almost a tenth of the 34,500-man force, for substandard performance. Of these officers, 1,020 failed the vetting procedure, including suspected ties to organized crime and medical problems. Of the 465 arrested police personnel, four were commanders dismissed on August 7, 2010, in Ciudad Juárez after 250 of their subordinates described them as corrupt. "The problem is considered worse at the local level, where fear or low wages prompt many officers to help drug gangs. State and local forces account for the vast majority of Mexico's 427,000 police officers."²⁵ Yet, some 417 municipalities (out of 2,441 municipalities nationwide) lack any type of security force—with 63.5 percent (362 communities) located in Oaxaca.²⁶ In early 2011, then-Attorney General Francisco Blake Mora reported that only 8.9 percent of municipal and state police had been certified as professionals.²⁷ In addition, men and women who forfeit their badges seldom show evidence of reformation. Instead, they may seek employment by a cartel or use their knowledge of the underworld to become freelance criminals.

Citizens of the poor neighborhood of Las Palomas, located in Tlalnepantla in Mexico State, recently expressed the frustration that boils over into lynchings. Anger at the sharp rise in car thefts—from 9.6 cases reported for every 100,000 residents to 27.4 cases during the first 6 months of 2010—spurred an outcry by

local residents, who believe law-enforcement officers collude with criminals. “We want police who will protect us, not rob us,” was their *cri de cœur*.²⁸

The Armed Forces.

The obstacles to creating reliable civilian agencies spurred the chief executive to rely heavily on the armed forces to fight the Sinaloa Cartel, the Gulf Cartel, the Juárez Cartel, the Beltrán Leyva brothers, La Familia Michoacana, the Arellano Félix Organization, Los Zetas, and other deadly organizations. After all, the cartels had exerted dominance over major enclaves of the country: the “Golden Triangle” where Chihuahua, Durango, and Sinaloa intersect; the “Tierra Caliente,” composed of parts of Mexico State, Guerrero, Michoacán, and Colima; the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in Oaxaca; areas of Baja California Sur; and zones of major cities lying along the border with the U.S. Southwest.

The President ordered the dispatch of contingents of thousands of troops to Michoacán, Guerrero, Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and other hot spots. Military personnel are trained to pursue, capture, and kill. They managed to decimate the Tijuana-based Arellano Félix Organization and capture or kill such notable *capos* as Osiel “The Friend Killer” Cárdenas Guillén (Gulf Cartel), Arturo Beltrán Leyva (Beltrán Leyva brothers), Édgar “La Barbie” Valdez Villarreal (Independent Cartel), and Nazario “The Most Crazy” Moreno González (La Familia Michoacana). Such successes aside, charges of killings, rapes, disappearances, and torture inflicted on civilians abound. Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) has published detailed reports of 65 cases involving Army abuses since 2007, and received complaints of more

than 1,100 additional human rights violations in the first 6 months of 2010. The armed forces insist on trying suspects in closed military tribunals, and only one officer has been sentenced for human rights offenses committed during the Calderón administration.²⁹

The armed forces also face a high rate of desertion. Between 2001 and 2008, 150,000 officers and soldiers went missing, including 18,128 in 2008. From 2000 to 2010, 1,680 members of Special Forces and Special Amphibious Groups (GANFES) went absent without leave (AWOL) despite a 115 percent salary increase since 2006.³⁰

As discussed in the next section, not only do military tribunals appear to treat offenders with kid gloves, but the civilian judicial system teems with corrupt, unprofessional prosecutors and judges; Kafkaesque artifices such as the “*amparo*,” a multipurpose injunction; and a flagrant lack of transparency – whether it is handling cases of an alleged drug Mafiosi or common criminals.

INABILITY OF CITIZENS TO INFLUENCE ELECTED OFFICIALS

Why can't voters apply pressure on elected officials to combat crime? Calderón bristles at the “failed state” characterization, and the Obama administration has turned summersaults to refute that appellation. Freedom House and other think-tanks that assess “freedom,” “democracy,” and “failed states” have given Mexico reasonably high marks in recent years; however, in 2009 Freedom House chided “the government's inability to implement an effective response to the power of organized criminal groups that have spread violence and terror through significant parts

of the country.”³¹ Still, this distinguished organization focuses on processes rather than practices—namely the presence of a competitive multiparty political system, universal adult suffrage, regular transparent and fair elections, access of major political parties through the media, and open campaigning. The Fund for Peace and *Foreign Policy Magazine*, which ranks Mexico 96 out of 177 (a 1 implies a Somalia-like collapse) on its 2010 “Failed States Index,” concentrates on ethnic conflicts, separatist movements, disputes with neighboring countries, risks of military coups, guerrilla activities, terrorist organization, and control of territory.³²

Although helpful, such criteria overlook the chasm between the political elite and grassroots constituents, breeding in the latter a sense of political helplessness. This situation arises from several factors. These include a constitutional ban on reelecting chief executives and the absence of a run-off if no contender garners a majority of the votes. President Calderón entered Los Pinos with 33.9 percent of the ballots cast, just a .6 percent lead over Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a messianic populist backed by a leftist coalition. A second round of voting to achieve a 51 percent mandate could have forced parties to negotiate, bargain, and compromise in pursuit of a successful mandate. The crystallization of a winning coalition might have contributed to collaboration in Congress, where intolerance between and among parties thrives and continually leads to deadlock and drift.

Other constitutional and electoral law elements that divorce the establishment from the masses are: (1) prohibiting independent candidacies, (2) forbidding civic groups from airing media ads during campaigns, (3) continuing the dominance of party chiefs in selecting nominees and ranking them on propor-

tional representation lists used to select one-fourth of the 128-member Senate and two-fifths of the 500-seat Chamber of Deputies, (4) disallowing deputies, senators, governors, state legislators, and mayors to serve consecutive terms in their offices, and (5) failing to forge a coherent, responsible left.

With respect to the last point, López Obrador began his political career as a PRI mover-and-shaker. In 1989 he embraced the newly minted Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) to advance his career. Twenty years later, he broke with the PRD to accept the backing of two small, opportunistic organizations: the Workers' Party (PT) and the Convergence Party (*Convergencia*). The self-named "Legitimate President" and his followers have opposed Calderón initiatives even as they cross swords with a moderate New Left current (*los Chuchos*),³³ which now controls PRD's national executive committee and state structure. Should one of these groups support a presidential bill on a subject other than social spending or monopoly-busting, the other accuses it of selling out to the running dogs of neoliberalism, and increasingly more common—to "neo-fascism."

These considerations, combined with the fact that so many lawmakers lack defined constituencies, militate against advancing the interest of average men and women. All the while, elected officials line their pockets with generous salaries, hefty fringe benefits, Christmas bonuses, travel funds, free medical care, office expense accounts, pensions, "leaving office" stipends, and many other ways to live the good life. At the same time, the Federal Electoral Institute—which registers voters, supervises elections, and reports preliminary vote tallies—lavishes monies on political

parties, to the tune of 3.6 billion pesos in 2009. No wonder that the late, inordinately powerful politician and PRI dinosaur Carlos Hank Gonzalez, uttered the phrase: “Show me a politician who is poor, and I will show you a poor politician.”³⁴

Former Sinaloa Governor Juan S. Millán Lizárraga recounts the story of a newly-elected deputy who visited an impoverished flyspecked village in the far reaches of his territory in Veracruz. He told the subsistence-level and dirt-scratching peasants who shuffled into the town square to hear him: “Take a good, long look at my face . . . because this is the last time you are going to see it in this shit-kicking pueblo.” And he kept his word.³⁵

The 31 state governors and Mexico City mayor, whom PRI chief executives kept on a short leash 15 or 20 years ago, gained emancipation from central dominance when the opposition swept to power in 2000. The national media shed some light on irresponsible federal officials, but governors tend to rule the roost as *caciques* in their states.

These executives reign over fiefdoms thanks to a compliant press (whose owners fear losing state advertising), close economic bonds to the businessmen (who salivate for government contracts), blatant manipulation of state legislatures (whose members receive extravagant salaries and benefits in return for rubber-stamping executive initiatives), and control of local electoral institutes (whose officials are well remunerated) and state human rights commissions (whose commissioners enjoy prestige and attractive compensation). The spouses of governors traditionally head the states’ Integral Family development program (DIF), which fosters adoptions and child care, for which they may receive a stipend of \$100,000 or

more. Except when they descend on Mexico City during the preparation of the national budget, state executives can thumb their noses at Los Pinos. The federal government supplies 97 percent of state budgets.

The Judicial System.

High ranking jurists, tough military officers, business executives, and movie-makers have decried the venality of the judicial system. In a presentation to the Mexican Senate, Jorge Mario Pardo Rebolledo, the newest member of Mexico's Supreme Court, recognized the discontent with the imparting of justice in México. “[We] perceive that society is not satisfied with judicial decisions,” he said in an understatement worthy of the Guinness Book of Records.³⁶

Retired General Sergio Aponte Polito, who fought drug traffickers hammer-and-tongs in Baja California, has publicly lambasted the local police, prosecutors, judges, representatives of the Attorney General's Office (PGR), immigration agents, and customs officials for their ties to organized crime. “Corruption is the evil of all evils in our country . . . along with the lack of justice, impunity [for law breakers], irresponsibility, ineptitude, and demagogic . . . ,” he told a reporter.³⁷

In the same vein, entrepreneur Alejandro Martí, who suffered the kidnapping and murder of his 14-year-old son in 2008, implored Mexico's chief justice to “impose exemplary punishments on corrupt judges and magistrates,” adding that “an enormous lack of prestige characterizes our judicial authorities, our judges.”³⁸ Martí highlighted Magistrate Jesús Guadalupe Luna's release of a former PGR official, who had been sentenced to a 19-year term for kidnapping. This same judge also freed Iván Archivaldo Guzmán,

the son of Sinaloa Cartel boss Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán Loera.

Between 1995 and 2007, the Federal Judiciary Council (Consejo de la Judicatura Federal, or CJF) removed 22 judges and magistrates for irregularities; however, 41 percent of these men and women were reinstated. The most notable case involved Guadalajara magistrate Fernando López Murillo, who rendered five decisions favorable to “El Chapo” Guzmán and his ally, Héctor “El Guero” Palma, in 2003. Like Mexico’s other 960 judges and magistrates, he had the right to challenge his removal. Not only did the CJF return him to the bench, but López Murillo sought 14 million pesos (just over a million dollars) in compensation.³⁹

An analysis by the Monterrey Institute of Technology found that, of the 7.48 million crimes committed in 2010, only 1 percent of offenders were convicted. The study indicated that citizens reported only 64,000 crimes, about 15 percent of which were investigated. However, the length of investigations has fallen from 269 days in 2006 to 130 days. In the same vein, CNDH President Raúl Plascencia Villanueva claimed that wrongdoers enjoy impunity in nearly 98 percent of the crimes carried out. Statistics for the past 10 years indicate, he said, that citizens report only 1.5 million of the 13 to 15 million offenses that take place annually. Of these reported infractions of the law, courts hand down just 150,000 sentences. These alarming statistics explain why residents sometimes take the law into their own hands.

In March 2008, Mexico’s Congress approved a constitutional amendment to replace secretive proceedings and shadowy techniques with a U.S.-style adversarial approach in judicial proceedings. The change includes open trials, the admission of recorded phone

calls into evidence if one of the participants agrees, a presumption of innocence, the right of the defendant to face his accuser, and evidence-based proceedings—with a greater emphasis on forensics and meticulous fact-gathering. “In what experts say is nothing short of a revolution, Mexico is gradually abandoning its centuries-old Napoleonic structure of closed-door, written inquisitions—largely a legacy of Spanish colonial rule—that had long been criticized as rife with corruption, opaque decisions, abuse of defendants, and red tape that bogged down cases for years.”⁴⁰

In early 2009, legal specialists, with the help of U.S. attorneys, were attempting to iron out the protocols of this legislation, which will not be implemented in the 31 states and the Federal District before 2016. Meanwhile, “we work with the same system that was used during the Spanish Inquisition,” avers Alberto Barbaz, then Mexico State’s Attorney General.⁴¹ For example, information derived from electric shocks and other coercive interrogation techniques constitutes credible evidence. “In America, prosecutors investigate, but the judge and jury decide the facts,” said human rights lawyer Santiago Aguirre Espinoza. “Here statements made to prosecutors are facts. There is no cross-examination or right to confront accusers. If a person in Mexico confesses to a prosecutor, it is considered sufficient evidence for a detention—so there is an inherent incentive to obtain confessions.”⁴²

Two Good Samaritans hefting a video camera revealed Mexico’s Byzantine criminal justice system. Roberto Hernández, a graduate student in public policy at the University of California, and his wife Layda Negrete, a lawyer conversant in Mexico’s dysfunctional legal system, made the award-winning documentary, *Presumed Guilty*, portraying how, in 2005,

police picked up a 26-year-old street vendor, Antonio Zúñiga, threw him behind bars, and slapped him with a murder charge. Even the absence of physical evidence and the presence of multiple witnesses who said the young man was elsewhere at the time of the crime did not deter the judge from sentencing him to 20 years in prison. Only a technical error—the defendant's first lawyer had a fake license—opened the way for a second trial and Zúñiga's gaining his freedom.⁴³ Figure 4 depicts the confidence the local populace has in its judges and magistrates.

Date	Much or Some Confidence in Judges and Magistrates	Little or no Confidence in Judges and Magistrates	Variation
July 2006	35%	55%	-20%
May 2006	34	58	-24
June 2005	34	62	-28
May 2004	22	65	-43
August 2003	26	68	-42
May 2003	30	64	-34
June 2002	24	64	-40

Source: Parametría: "Encuesta Nacional en Vivienda," available from www.parametria.com.mx/.

Figure 4. Confidence in Judges and Magistrates.

Penitentiaries.

If justice does happen to prevail in the unreliable system, and the culprit receives a deserved prison sentence, he will enter a penal system that is run, in general, by poorly trained men and women who rely on low-paid guards to maintain order. Authorities nominally control Mexico's penitentiaries, especially

the nine high-security federal facilities. In reality, pay-offs to prison officials and guards, combined with a proliferation of organized gangs behind bars, give well-heeled convicts unparalleled influence. Inmates sometimes settle scores with adversaries when incarcerated—exemplified by the 2004 murder of El Chapo's brother, Arturo Guzmán, inside La Palma prison in Mexico State. Thanks to widespread access to cell phones, prisoners find it easy to engage in extortion.

A committee of the Chamber of Deputies estimated that convicts had extorted 186,620 million pesos in the 2001-07 time frame. Just as in the United States, drugs and alcohol flow freely inside prison walls. Of the 37,000 inmates in Mexico City's penal institutions, an estimated 25,900 are addicts. Authorities admit that the availability of these substances, which may generate 15.5 million pesos a month, represents a convenient way to minimize melees and curb other violent outburst. As a prison official told a city councilman: "Sir, if I cut off the flow of drugs, there will be a mutiny the next day."⁴⁴ Overcrowding accentuates turmoil.⁴⁵ Of the nation's 439 federal, state, and local penal institutions, 228 groan with an excessive number of inmates. In Mexico City's Reclusorio Oriente, 70 prisoners occupy one six-by-five square meter cell. This means that they must sleep standing up, lie in hallways, compete for open spaces to stretch out, or pay for access to a bunk. Wealthy "deluxe prisoners" grease the palms of guards, who—for the right price—will permit them to exit the facility for a few hours to conduct business, engage in a tryst, or commit a crime.⁴⁶

VIGILANTE ERUPTIONS

The Case of Tláhuac.

One of the most sensational cases in recent years took place on November 23, 2004. San Juan Ixtayopan is a quaint community of 35,000 residents tucked in the pine-covered hills in Tláhuac.⁴⁷ People in this borough on the eastern fringe of Mexico City were enraged that only a dozen police officers—one for about every 3,000 men, women, and children—sought to preserve order in their largely rural community. They were particularly upset at criminals believed to be stalking children, with a view to kidnapping and molesting them. One of three men in a grey sedan began filming the premises of the Popol Vuh primary school where 380 youngsters were getting ready to leave classes for the day. Fearing that the outsiders were predators, residents activated dozens of crude, rooftop bullhorns that serve as alarm devices in some poor areas. Approximately 2,000 people quickly assembled, surrounded the unknown vehicle, overturned it, tied up and beat the occupants with metal pipes, and splashed two men with gasoline and set them on fire. Although mauled, a third man escaped and was given care, including dialysis, at the Central Military Hospital.

It turned out that the car's occupants, Víctor Mireles Barrera, Édgar Moreno Nolasco, and Cristóbal Bonilla Collín, were plainclothes detectives with the Federal Preventative Police on the prowl for small-time drug dealers under orders from their superiors. Although they showed their credentials, two of the officers (Mireles and Moreno) were seized, tied up, bathed in gasoline, set afire and burned to death. In a black comedy of errors, it took riot police 3 hours and

35 minutes to reach the horrifying scene, while television cameras and radio journalists were disseminating the incredible episode throughout the country.

Upon witnessing the event on television, Mayor López Obrador immediately contacted Marcelo Ebrard Casaubon, the city's chief of public security. A man known for his rigid, authoritarian personality, Ebrard was ensconced in his hideaway office on Liverpool Street involved in a television interview with reporters from *Proceso* magazine. He ordered his staff not to disturb him under any circumstances. As a result, his subordinates feared taking the initiative without a green light from their chief to the point of not even passing him a note.

Subsequently, President Vicente Fox fired Ebrard and his second in command for their errant behavior. Still, López Obrador, who opposed the chief executive on every front, as well as various municipal authorities, trotted out excuse after excuse for failing to accomplish a rescue even as they deplored the chief executive's "premature" ousting of the security chief. Ebrard responded that: "The president . . . is afraid of what I could say about the happenings at Tláhuac and thus decided on my arbitrary dismissal."⁴⁸ Public justifications for the tragedy included: The terrain in Tláhuac was inhospitable for helicopters; people jammed the narrow streets where the violence took place; and cell phones were not picking up signals in the area. Inside the halls of government, officials claimed that guerrillas belonging to the People's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARP) orchestrated the macabre episode.⁴⁹ At no point did senior decisionmakers point out that a contingent of DF preventative police was barely a kilometer away from ground zero, that the trucks carrying journalists had no trouble reaching

the scene, and that, even if helicopters could not have landed, their crews could have broken up the rabble with water cannons, gunshots, and tear-gas canisters.

López Obrador, an enemy of Fox, did not want a blemish on his mayoral record as he was preparing to run for president. He not only downplayed the affair, but also sought to exonerate Ebrard, a presidential aspirant in 2012, by keeping him in his cabinet as secretary of social development. At the same time, the mayor alluded to the inevitability of poor people from indigenous background resorting to traditional “*usos y costumbres*” (“uses and customs”) of their native communities. In a message that seemed to invite vigilantism, the mayor claimed “[I]t’s better not to get involved in the traditions and beliefs of [indigenous] people.”⁵⁰ In response to this theory, then-Senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos stated: “There are still imbeciles in power that speak of *usos y costumbres* and that justify displays of mob violence . . . arguing that mob violence is never wrong . . . [such statements are] disgusting.”⁵¹

“It [police indifference] happens to us all the time. . . . Sometimes it takes days for them to respond to an emergency call, if they respond at all. Many people don’t even bother to call them. Law enforcement is a joke,” stated Daniel Flores, a 21-year-old engineering student who said he had stumbled into a major gang fight in his neighborhood a few months earlier but could not get the police to break it up.⁵²

Anger at past neglect and distrust of police played a role in the vigilante act. However, there is evidence that it was not a spontaneous eruption by a mob that had run amuck. For instance, at the request of the reporters from TV and radio networks, the executioners pushed the bleeding, puffy-faced victims in front of

TV cameras and radio microphones so they could be interviewed. Videos of the crowd did show anger on the faces of some observers; others appeared serene, as if pent-up frustrations of daily lives—poverty, homelessness, disease, joblessness, divorce—were released through the executions. One expert spoke in terms of a catharsis of the “darker elements” of the viewers’ beings.⁵³ “Onlookers cheered and shouted obscenities as the agents were splattered with blood.” Other average people casually milled around the charred bodies left bleeding in the street.⁵⁴

Authorities normally would have dismissed the Tláhuac incident as López Obrador did; namely, an example of the poor carrying out traditional justice. However, the involvement of Federal police in the incident and the world-wide media attention that it garnered excited an investigation of the episode. In mid-2009 nine suspects received sentences of 46 years and 6 months for the horrendous crime.⁵⁵ Additional individuals were subsequently convicted.

Little Rats of Tepic.

YouTube videos captured another especially grisly episode; these films featured five scruffy teenagers wearing blue-jeans and tee-shirts and slouched against a dark wall. Suddenly, a fist slammed into one boy’s jaw. Next, the barrel of an automatic rifle pierced the frame, exciting unvarnished terror on the minors’ faces.

“Why are you here?” demanded a sinister off-screen voice.

“For robbing” sobbed the baby-faced captive named Édgar Eduardo.

"You see. You were little rats and now look at you," snarled the questioner.

This episode took place in the fly-specked city of Tepic, capital of Nayarit state, 1,300 miles south of San Diego, in October 2009. The boys allegedly had robbed the luxury apartment of a shadowy figure. The dwelling's owner did not bother to call the police. Rather, he and his cronies solved the problem themselves. They collared the presumed thieves, took them to an abandoned house, shaved their heads, beat them with fists and gun butts, and forced them to French kiss each other. In the background, the vigilantes are heard vowing to cut off their hands and sodomize the captives if they refused to engage in this humiliating gesture. To add to insult to injury, the adolescents were dumped naked on the street.

The event depicted in "Little Rats of Tepic," a video that was quickly withdrawn from circulation, excited mixed responses among *tepicanos*, especially because one of the boys claimed that they had been arrested by the state police and turned over to their four purported torturers, who were subsequently arrested. Huicot Rivas Álvarez, president of Nayarit's Human Rights Commission, deplored the act: "Opening the door to justice by your own hand is an enormous step back to a state of barbarism and lack of culture," he asserted, adding that: "In a democratic state crime can never be used to combat crime."⁵⁶

Others disagreed. "In Mexico, we need death squads to hunt and exterminate rats and kidnappers without further expense to society and without . . . [do gooders] getting in the way," wrote a contributor on the website of the Mexico City newspaper *El Universo*.

*sal.*⁵⁷ “I recognize that this is not the correct way to administer justice, but I can’t deny that it makes me happy that this type of thing happens,” stated another reader.⁵⁸ As with a growing number of citizens, he had no difficulty ignoring Article 17 of the Mexican Constitution, which states that “No person can mete out justice on his own nor engage in violence to take the law in his own hands.”

TRENDS IN VIGILANTISM

The practice of *linchamientos* or vigilantism raises many questions. How many such acts have occurred in recent years? How many of those attacked die? What are the circumstances surrounding vigilante acts? What perceived crimes precipitated these eruptions? Where do most of these acts take place? Do “*usos y costumbres*” contribute to Mexico’s rough justice? What is the relationship between community justice and the drug war?

Number of Acts.

The data shown in Figure 5 are approximate. First, officials often announce a number of vigilante acts without specifying the cases. Mexico City police claimed that eight attempted *linchamientos* occurred during the first 10 months of 2010; yet, only seven could be documented. Meanwhile, their Mexico State counterparts claimed 15 vigilante acts in this period—with only eight verified in the media. For their part, law enforcement agencies in Oaxaca stated that 20 cases of popular justice had taken place in their state, while an intensive Internet search turned up only three. Hence, these are approximations at best, but are nonetheless disturbing.

Year	Number of Vigilante Actions
2011 (through June 17)	8
2010	23
2009	17
2008	11
2007	n.a.
2006	n.a.
2005	4
2004	8
2003	20
2002	5
2001	16 (11)*
2000	41
1999	29
1998	15
1997	38
1996	47 (deep economic recession)
1995	40 (deep economic recession)
1994	25
1993	18
1992	n.a.
1991	6
1990	n.a.
1989	4
1988	3
1987	3
1986	n.a.
1985	5
TOTAL	379

*Professor Raúl Rodríguez Guillén provided this number (11).

Source: Antonio Fuentes, "El Estado y la furia," *El cotidiano*, No. 131; Vol. 20, May-June 2005; Professor Raúl Rodríguez Guillén, electronic mail to author, March 31, 2011.

Figure 5. Number of Vigilante Actions.

Second, authorities may not intervene in, much less file official reports of rough justice when it happens in poor indigenous communities. There is a tendency to write off such behavior as traditional practices in these areas. Moreover, their involvement may place the lives of police at stake. Third, the circumstances in which most vigilante attacks occur—at night, in remote venues—means that there may be few journalists and police on duty to record the event. In addition, editors and commanders may have assigned their personnel to activities involving the drug war. On the basis of available data, the number of lynchings, while fluctuating, is not increasing. Figure 6 shows the acts committed that prompted citizens to take justice into their own hands during the period 2008 through April 1, 2001.

Acts that Sparked Citizen Justice, 2008-April 2011	No. of Incidents
Robbery	33
Kidnapping	7
Abuse of Authority	4
Sexual Assault	5
Murder	2
Vehicle Accident	3
Religious Dispute	1
Miscellaneous	1
TOTAL	55

Source: Compiled by Author.

**Figure 6. Types of Citizen Justice,
2008-April 1, 2011.**

Based on data compiled by Mexican scholars, just over 42 percent of vigilante acts analyzed between 1988 and 2005 ended in the deaths of the suspects. Such executions are most likely to take place in remote areas of Oaxaca, Guerrero, Morelos, and Chiapas.⁵⁹

Circumstances Surrounding Vigilante Acts.

Figure 7 illuminates the outcomes of vigilante acts. In general, the targets are young males with some education who are more likely to be seized in the evening, at night, or in early-morning hours. A disproportionate number of *linchamientos* occur around Christmas when people have *aguinaldos* (bonuses), free time, and may drink more than usual. Most of the cases take place in rural enclaves near Mexico City or other urban areas, and the local residents—men and women—frequently assemble when church bells are tolled. Seldom do the perpetrators use firearms; they are more likely to pick up objects at hand—stones, bottles, knives, sticks—with which to attack the presumed wrongdoer. Figure 8 depicts the circumstances of the vigilantism.

Location	Subject Killed	Vigilante Acts Thwarted	Total
Mexico City	11	29	40
Mexico State	5	26	31
Morelos	14	13	27
Oaxaca	16	2	18
Guerrero	8	10	18
Chiapas	8	4	12
TOTAL	62	84	146

Source: Raúl Rodríguez Guillén, "Violencia y delincuencia: los linchamientos en México," José Luis Cisneros and Everardo Carballo Crua, eds., *Pensar el future de México*, Mexico City, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 2011, p. 181.

Figure 7. Outcome of *Linchamientos*:
1988 to Early 2005.

Element	Characteristics	Comments
Gender of Target	Male; a woman was involved in the abduction of a child in Tepexpan, Acolman, Mexico State, on March 10, 2011; two-thirds of accused are single individuals.	
Age	18 to 30 years old.	
Education	Some; at least primary school.	Some youngsters apprehended have gone beyond primary school.
Time of Day	Evening; night; early morning.	
Time of Year	The several months before and after Christmas.	People have additional funds because of distribution of <i>aguinaldos</i> or Christmas bonuses, free time, and increased alcohol consumption.
Location	Poor, relatively un-policed communities in or near urban areas where insecurity, impunity, abuse, and violence are integral to everyday life. As in the title of a sonnet written by José Alfredo Jiménez, <i>linchamientos</i> take place where “ <i>La vida no vale nada</i> ” (“Life is Worthless.”)	
Means to Summon Mob	Tolling of church bells; activation of sirens in some areas of Mexico City.	
Composition of Mob	Neighbors, friends, relatives of the “victimized” individuals.	Males are more likely to inflict punishment, while women denounce the act, encourage the men to respond, and take part in discussions of what course to take with the suspect.
Weapons	Bottles, stones, machetes, clubs, ropes, and fire (Vilas found the use of firearms in only 13% of cases.)	
Rituals	His captors may force the subject, his hands bound, to walk a gauntlet during which he is insulted, spat upon, and hit.	Vilas reports that such conduct preceded the burning of alleged rapist and murderer, Rodolfo Soler Hernández, a captive in Tathuicapa, Playa Vicente, Veracruz, in August 31, 1996.

Source: Interview with Raúl Rodríguez Guillén, professor of Anthropology, Universidad Autónoma de Azcapotzalco, March 11, 2011, Mexico City; Carlos M. Vilas, *By their Own Hands; Mass Lynchings in Contemporary Mexico*, Monografías.com, available from www.monografias.com/trabajos39/lynching-in-mexico/lynching-in-Mexico2.shtml?monosearch.

Figure 8. Circumstances of Vigilantism.

ORGANIZED VIGILANTE GROUPS

In the absence of trustworthy police and judges, some citizens have taken the law into their own hands. They have organized against the violence waged against themselves, their families, their neighbors, and their municipalities. On December 3, 2008, six masked men stopped the car of Jorge and César Muñoz Reyes who were carrying cattle from their ranch outside Parral, a small city in Chihuahua state, where assassins killed Pancho Villa in 1923.

The culprits ordered the men out of their vehicle, shot César, and kidnapped Jorge. Their father had to mortgage his property to pay a 5 million peso ransom (\$385,000) to obtain Jorge's freedom. Five days later, local cattlemen began to meet with other business community members to discuss creating a self-protection force. The leader of the group spoke cautiously only about the "possibility" of such a vigilante movement.

Members of the self-styled Citizen Command for Juarez (CCJ) have been more outspoken. This group sprang to life in the violence-plagued Ciudad Juárez, which lies across the Rio Grande from El Paso, Texas. In an e-mail to the media, this shadowy organization claimed to be funded by local entrepreneurs outraged by kidnappings, murders, and extortion in the sprawling metropolis of 1.4 million people. The CCJ may have killed and piled up the corpses of six men in their 20s and 30s in October 2008, leaving behind a sign: "Message for all the rats: This will continue." Early this year, a body was found in the city along with the warning: "This is for those who continue extorting."

The respected *El Universal* newspaper reported that on January 15, 2009, the CCJ sent a communica-

tion to the media, warning that it would kill one criminal every 24 hours. “The time has come to put an end to this disorder . . . if criminals are identified, information can be sent electronically about the ‘bad person’ who deserves to die.” It was signed, “El Coma” [“The Coma”].⁶⁰

Reuters news service reported that another group – “Businessmen United, The Death Squad” – aired on *YouTube*, threatening to hunt down *mafiosi* in Ciudad Juárez.⁶¹ At least two other vigilante-style bands have dispatched statements to the media: one in the northern state of Sonora, which borders Arizona; the other in the Pacific state of Guerrero, home to the resort city of Acapulco – now referred to as “Narcopulco” because of ubiquitous drug activities.⁶²

The execution of Benjamín Le Baron, an anti-cartel activist in Galeana, Chihuahua, prompted his law-abiding Mormon community to consider forming its own self-defense contingent. In May 2009, hitmen kidnapped Le Baron’s brother, prompting the 2,000 local citizens to stage demonstrations in the state capital of Chihuahua. They refused to pay a \$1 million ransom. Even after the youth was released, residents – many of whom are dual U.S. citizens – held protests to plead for police protection in the remote desert lands of Chihuahua State.

On July 7, gunmen broke into Le Baron’s home and tortured him in front of his family before absconding with him and his brother-in-law, executing them, and dumping their corpses in the nearby countryside. At first, Chihuahua’s PRI Governor, José Reyes Baeza, agreed to provide training and weapons for a security squad in Galeana. This proposal met criticism from the president of the CNDH, who insisted that arming citizens would indicate a “failure” of the political regime to protect the public.

Taxi operators in Mexico City's Magdalena Contreras borough did take the law into their own hands. They suffered multiple assaults and robberies by thugs, who were believed to be protected by the police. When local authorities failed to nab the culprits after three complaints, the drivers acted. They seized the presumed leader of the assailants, "El Perro" ("The Dog"), and bludgeoned him to death. Their goals were to send a message to the gangsters, to obtain the names of other members of the criminal band, and to "accomplish justice" on their own. On August 14, 2009, Ismael Quintero Oliver and Marcos Érik Pérez Mora, leaders of the informal "pacto de los choferes" ("drivers' pact") were arrested, with El Perro's cadaver in the backseat of their Ford Aerostar. The case has yet to be resolved.

The groups cited in Figure 9 (below) have little in common with mobs that carry out vigilante acts. To begin with, they have an organization and structure. In addition, they often enjoy funding from the private sector and politicians. Above all, they sprang to life to ward off attacks by the extremely well-armed drug cartels. Indeed, the success of the narco-syndicates has diminished whatever influence these groups wielded.

Citizens Protection Group	Date/Location of Organization	Leadership	Objectives	Results
Popular Anti-Drug Army	Nov. 2008; various cities in Guerrero, Sonora Morelos, and Mexico State	Obscure	Combat cartels	
Juárez Residents for Peace (Juarenses por La Paz)	Cd. Juárez, Chih.	Members of the private sector.	Combat cartels	
Businessmen United, The Death Squad	June 2008; Cd. Juárez, Chih.	Members of the private sector	Posted a video on <i>YouTube</i> threatening to go after the city's kidnappers and criminals.	
Local residents mobilized to fight organized crime	Spring 2009; Galeana, Chih.	Benjamín LeBarón, leader of a small community of apostate Mormons, led the battle against organized crime, in response to the kidnapping of LeBarón's nephew.	Combat extortion and kidnappings carried out by drug cartels; criticized the failure of authorities to protect their community of 5,000 residents, located 125 miles south of Cd. Juárez.	Following the July 7 killing of LeBarón and his brother-in-law, Gov. José Reyes Baeza pledged to arm and train 77 young men as policemen in the municipality; in the face of political pressure, he reneged on this promise, but dispatched additional state police to the area; LeBarón's brother said that local residents would support "SOS Chihuahua," an offshoot of the national "SOS" organization founded by prominent businessman Alejandro Martí whose son was abducted and slain; meanwhile, Benjamín's uncle, Adrián LeBaron, avowed that "absolutely no legal authority" existed in five Chihuahua municipalities which was not enthralled with organized crime: Nicolás Bravo, Gómez Farías, Zaragoza, Buenaventura, and Casas Grandes.

Source: Julian Cardona, "Shadow of Vigilantes Appears in Mexico Drug War," *Reuters*, January 19, 2009; Ana Ávila, "Grupos se arman contra el crimen" ("Groups Arm Themselves against Crime"), *El Universal*, January 29, 2009; Carlos Villalobos Lozano, "Fue venganza asesinato de Benjamín LeBarón" ("Benjamín LeBarón was Assassinated for Revenge"), *El Ágora*, July 8, 2009; "Mormones crearán policía comunitaria con ayuda de las autoridades" ("Mormons Will Create a Community Police Force with the Help of Authorities"), *Univision.com*, July 10, 2009; "Narco controla 5 municipios de Chihuahua: Tío LeBarón" ("Uncle LeBarón Reports that Narco Traffickers Control 5 Municipalities in Chihuahua"), *El Universal*, July 17, 2009; Evangelina Hernández, "Mexico-Ciudad Juárez: Autodefensa, arma de juarenses" ("Mexico-Ciudad Juárez: Local Citizens Defend Themselves"), *Offnews.info*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, August 23, 2009; Yara Silva, "Pobladores casi linchan a dos asaltantes de un microbus" ("Citizens Nearly Lynch Two Assailants of a Microbus"), *El Universal.com*, December 15, 2009; and "Rescatan de linchamiento a cinco en Edomex" ("Five Rescued from Lynching in Mexico State"), *El Universal.com*, August 13, 2010.

Figure 9. Vigilante Organizations.

ADDRESSING “COMMUNITY JUSTICE”

First, it is important to recognize that vigilantism appears unrelated to President Calderón’s war on drugs. Areas where community justice takes place are seldom those where the government is battling cartels. In fact, the very presence of these syndicates and their pursuit by the federal police and the armed forces may militate against spontaneous acts against perceived criminals.

Second, it is ironic that vigilante acts do not appear to be increasing amid the atmosphere of violence afflicting Mexico. Vigilantism may send a message to authorities that they should be more attentive to conditions in hot spots, lest outbreaks of grassroots mayhem endanger their professional and political careers. Of course, there is the possibility that police, who may publicly blame other perpetrators, are involved in the lynchings.

Third, the federal police should train officers in skills related to negotiating the release of prisoners. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, which provides instruction to Mexican authorities combating crime, might extend this program to a cadre of police in Mexico City, Mexico State, Oaxaca, and other entities that abound with vigilantism.

Fourth, like the highly-respected *Alianza Cívica*, professional associations, and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) could spur accountability by forming independent grassroots committees to keep tabs on law-enforcement in *linchamiento*-prone venues. One precedent might be the National Solidarity Program, launched by President Carlos Salinas in

1990. Some 100,000 local bodies – composed largely of women – emerged to prevent waste, fraud, and corruption in the venture's anti-poverty projects.

Fifth, such oversight committees could help establish neighborhood watches, with citizens encouraged to contact other community members when suspicious individuals enter their streets, parks, school zones, and commercial areas. The local observers could alert neighbors via ringing church bells, bull horns, the *Internet, Facebook, and Twitter*. Video cameras, monitored by watch groups, would enhance the success of this enterprise. The alarms in high-crime areas of Mexico City should be installed in other metropolitan areas.

Sixth, if successful, oversight committees in one town could assist one or more neighboring towns to form similar entities – with the goal of configuring a network of organizations linked together. Mayors in the Los Rosales zone, which lies on the border of Mexico State and Mexico City, have signed accords to collaborate in behalf of their citizens. Regrettably, highly publicized pacts in Mexico often are a dime a dozen. In any case, citizen-led groups could complement or supplant such initiatives.

Seventh, international lending institutions should condition financial assistance on Mexico's committing itself to registering vehicles and vetting taxi owners. Pirate taxis facilitate the nightmarish contagion of "express kidnappings," extortion, robbery, and other crimes in major cities, along with attendant vigilantism in response. Of the 110,000-unit taxi fleet in Mexico City, an estimated 30,000 illegal cabs roam its 16 boroughs. Attacks on drivers contribute to their banding together to maul or kill their attackers.

Eighth, the Roman Catholic Church must take an unequivocal stance against *linchamientos*. For clergymen in Oaxaca to excuse such behavior towards

Protestant fundamentalists mocks Christian tenets, exhibits blatant intolerance, and encourages acts of savagery.

Finally, only when Mexico—with assistance from other nations—establishes competent, modern, honest police forces and judiciaries will people forgo rough justice and submit themselves to the rule of law.

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APPENDIX 1

SPONTANEOUS VIGILANTE ACTIVITIES

Place	Date / Time	Target(s)	Act(s) of Vigilantism	Site of Act	Result
Tepexpan, Acolman, Mexico State	March 10, 2011 (afternoon)	Three men and a woman allegedly attempted to kidnap two children from a primary school.	Some 100 residents answered the children's cry for help and the rolling of church bells to beat the abductress even as two of her partners tried to flee.	Poor community outside of the DF.	The State Security Agency (ASE) used tear gas shots in the air to rescue the three captives whose automobile was set on fire.
Ixtapalucia, Mexico State	March 9, 2011	Bus driver hit two pedestrians.	Local residents sought to lynch the driver.	Poor community outside the DF.	
Miguel de la Madrid colonia, Durango, Dgo.	March 1, 2011 (evening)	Romualdo Ramírez Montiel allegedly attempted an armed robbery of a store owned by Eleuterio Quiñones Neávares.	"Don Eleuterio" shot the intruder.	Poor rural community	Local residents threatened to block the streets unless the shopkeeper was absolved of any crime.
San Martín Mexicapan, Oaxaca	Feb. 17, 2011	Two men believed to be attacking taxi drivers.	Dozens of drivers beat and mauled the subjects.	Poor rural community	The taxi drivers fled when the municipal police arrived.
Altepexi, Puebla	Feb. 16, 2011 (evening)	Two men presumed to be pulling off a robbery.	100 citizens, who believed the culprits had committed previous thefts, seized and beat them.		Local police saved the men from being lynched.
Santa María Coatán, Tlalhuacán, Mexico State	Feb. 9, 2011 (evening)	A man who attempted to kidnap two residents after he had killed another member of the community.	A crowd seized the assailant and tried to burn him to death.		The State Security Agency (ASE) saved the culprit even as the policemen used tear gas to fend off citizens, who pelted them with stones and bottles; in retaliation for the lack of security in their neighborhood, 400 people blocked a federal highway.
San Dionisio	Jan. 19, 2011 (evening)	Three armed men—Lorenzo Serrás, Carlos Vásquez and Robert Fernández—attempted to kidnap the local mayor.	A crowd surprised the culprits whom they tied up and sought to execute.	Poor indigenous community	Elements of the Army negotiated the release of the captives.
2010					
San Martín Cuautitlán, Chalco, Mexico State	Oct. 20, 2010	A car in which two men were riding crashed into another automobile, killing the driver.	Local residents sought to lynch the two men in the vehicle that hit the second car.	Poor community near DF.	Police prevented the execution.
Ex Hacienda de Enmedio, Tlalnepantla, Mexico State	Oct. 20, 2010	Three armed men reportedly tried to rob a house of money and jewelry.	Some 50 local residents answered an alarm and caught Jesús Sánchez Rubio, 28, and Ismael Moreno Pérez and threatened to lynch them (Their accomplice escaped).	Poor rural community	Police arrived in time to prevent the execution.
Small town of Tetela del Volcán, Morelos	Oct. 17, 2010	Five presumed kidnappers—four men and one woman—who sought to abduct a gasoline station owner.	The citizens seized the culprits from the police, denuded and beat them, and began to burn them along with their clothing.	Poor community.	The five individuals confessed to planning the kidnapping and were charged by authorities after being taken to the hospital to treat burns that covered 5% of their bodies.
Villas de San Martín, Chalco, Mexico State	Oct. 14, 2010	Six Gypsies, including four children, were accused of robbing children, invading empty homes and engaging in witchcraft.	500 local residents attempted to kill the outsiders before being driven off by an ASE swat team; citizens hurled rocks and bottles at the police.		
Ciudad Juárez	Oct. 7, 2010	Three men sought to rob a local BBQ stand.	Customers and local residents killed one of the assailants with blows and knives, while the other two fled.		
Small town of Ascension (known as "La Chona") Chihuahua.	Sept. 21, 2010	Five young men suspected of abducting a 17-year-old female employed in a local seafood restaurant.	The crowd beat two of the alleged kidnappers to death; armed with picks, shovels, and machetes, the townspeople tried to block the entry of police and soldiers whom they berated as "corrupt."		The abducted woman was freed; one suspect escaped; two were apprehended; and two were killed; the event almost coincided with Sept. 23, the 45th anniversary of the attack on the nearby Madera Army barracks, led by school teacher Arturo Gámez and Dr. Pablo Gómez, who inspired a generation of guerrillas.
La Candelaria neighborhood of the DF's Coyoacán borough	Sept. 4, 2010	Two men caught breaking into a home.	Shot to death by an armed man inside the residence.		One of the burglars escaped; the other died; authorities detained the shooter.
San Agustín Tlaxiaca, Hidalgo	Sept. 2, 2010	Agustín Camacho Muñoz, 21, accused of raping and killing a 13-year-old girl.	Led by mothers accompanied by children and old people whom police tried to deter with tear gas, the		The accused was captured and, if convicted, faces a 24- to 40-year prison term. Despite this prospect, 700 citizens descended on the office of the PRI mayor to protest the

			outraged citizens attacked the suspect's home, breaking windows, smashing doors, and setting fire to the premises—with a view to hanging the young man and his family.		insecurity afflicting their neighborhood.
San Gregorio Cuautzingo, Chalco, Mexico State	Aug. 24, 2010	Five men attempted to rob an internet cafe.	Some 400 residents, who answered the tolling church bells, captured three of the five suspects whom they beat and tried to lynch.		A state police swat team rescued the three criminals. Meanwhile, 80 members of the community blocked access to their community to protest the lack of protection from authorities.
Jalatiaco, Oaxaca City	Aug. 16, 2010	Ismael López Hernández, 16, and an accomplice attempted to steal a cell phone from a woman.	Neighbors seized the young man, tied him up by his feet, held him for two hours, and threatened to hang him.	Poor community.	State and municipal police negotiated the culprit's release.
Santa Cruz Tagolaba, Oaxaca	Early August 20	Two men—Ubaldo Sánchez and José Manuel Baeza Quezada—accused of robbing a house.	Held the men captive and threatened to hang them and to burn the circus for which they worked.		Navy and state police used tear gas to free the prisoners, who were briefly imprisoned when the circus agreed to recover the items that had been stolen.
Tlachaloya, Toluca, Mexico State	Aug. 12? 2010	Five men, ranging in age from 17 to 40, accused of robbing a building materials store.	Some 400 local residents were planning to hang them.		ASE state police and Toluca's municipal police arrived in time to negotiate the subjects' release; for two hours, local residents refused to allow a police helicopter to land.
San Antonio Ozotepéc, DF borough of Milpa Alta	Aug. 6, 2010	Two presumed criminals, ages 19 and 34, sought to rob a milk delivery truck.	More than 300 citizens responded to the ringing of church bells; they captured the men and threatened to kill them; after 2 hours of negotiations, which included the city's attorney general and security secretary, the culprits were released.		The city government pledged to provide more police protection to the community, including twice-a-week helicopter patrols.
San Antonio Tecomitl, DF borough of Milpa Alta	July 17, 2010 (shortly before Midnight)	Two 18-year olds, David Pérez Guzmán and Daniel Aldrete Martínez, seized as criminals by local residents.	Citizens, including taxi drivers, held the young men for several hours, requesting that the media and authorities disseminate their pictures.	Rural community in the DF.	The police gained Custody of Pérez Guzmán and Aldrete Martínez after negotiations that lasted until 5 a.m. on Sunday.
San Mateo Tlaltenango, DF borough of Cusajimalpa	June 17, 2010	Two allegedly drunk Federal Police agents, dressed in civilian clothing, attempted to apprehend two young men as they left the local church.	The ringing of the church bells brought 200 local residents who beat and threatened to burn their captives; 100 militarized police (<i>granaderos</i>) rescued their colleagues.		The Federal Policemen, who suffered minor injuries, were exonerated of wrongdoing by the local prosecutor.
San Juan de Aragón, DF borough of Gustavo A. Madero	May 17, 2010	Edgar Contreras Carrillo, 22, armed with a pistol, sought to steal the belongings of 25 children aboard a school bus.	The bus driver foiled the attempted robbery.		Municipal police took the culprit into custody; parents demanded greater security for their neighborhood.
San Pedro Xalostoc, Ecatepec, Mexico State	May 17, 2010	An individual attempted to rob a bus.	Some 500 local residents captured the suspect, who died when residents blocked the ambulance attempting to take him to the hospital.		A 250-member swat team used tear gas to try to open a route for the emergency vehicle.
El Rosario, DF's Iztapalapa borough	May 14, 2010	David Villegas Torres, 35, and an accomplice stole 15,000 pesos and the car of an off-duty policeman.	Local citizens responded to his call for help; they caught and beat to death one of the alleged thieves who shot a policeman during the chase; the other assailant escaped.		No one admitted to being involved in the fracas, and no charges were brought.
Coatepec, Ixtapaluca, Mexico State	March 21, 2010	Two drunken young men allegedly crashed into a bicyclist.	Some 180 local residents grabbed the car occupants, whom they beat and planned to execute.	Poor community outside DF.	The local mayor negotiated with the crowd, which eventually released the suspect to authorities.
San Pedro Atocpan in DF's Milpa Alta borough	Feb. 22, 2010	Police arrested two local residents, Flores Becerril and Olivo Torres.	Members of the community believed that their neighbors were being falsely taken into custody and used stones, sticks, and homemade rockets to take captive the three arresting officers.		Authorities, including 1,500 riot police, used tear gas to free their colleagues.
Salinas del Marqués, Salinas Cruz, Oaxaca	Feb. 18, 2010 (4 a.m.)	Five suspects boarded a taxi and threatened the driver with a knife.	Some 200 fellow drivers prevented the theft, seized Jordi Alberto Gómez Ortega, splashed him with gasoline, and burned him to death.		
Morelia, Mich.	Mid-Jan. 2010	Five men accused of being "rats" or thieves.	Unknown parties strangled or suffocated four of their targets with packing tape; the fifth died from a gunshot.		Police attribute the deaths to vigilantes in light of a hand-written note beside the corpses: "This is what is going to happen to all the rats who rob houses, cars and pedestrians."

San Pedro Zicatépec, Tlaxiango del Valle, Mexico State	Jan. 7, 2010	Adrian Martínez Bolafos, 20, and Sergio Martínez Bolafos, 22, allegedly stole a taxi and auto parts.	More than 150 local residents captured the young men whom they beat and stoned.	Rural, poor community	Elements of the ASE prevented the killing of the culprits.
2009					
San Martín de las Rajas, Mexico State	Dec. 29, 2009	Bus passengers accused five armed subjects of robbing them in Lerma.	They apprehended the supposed thieves, beat them badly, and tied them to a tree.	Poor community near DF.	The ASE arrived in time to save the lives of the culprits.
San Pedro Chiautzingo, Tepetlaoxtoc, Mexico State	Dec. 27, 2009 (night)	Five men appeared to be inserting cables to steal electricity in an area where such thefts abounded.	300 people gathered, caught two of the suspects, and began to beat them.	Poor community near DF.	240 ASE elements, who thwarted their execution, took them to the sub-procuraría in Texcoco.
San Miguel Ajusco, Tlalpan, D.F.	Dec. 14, 2009	Microbus passengers defended themselves against criminals.	Passengers banded together against four robbers, who sought to steal their belongings; two of the culprits escaped even as the enraged citizens beat and prepared to hang the other two near a local church.		An Emergency Rescue Squad (ERUM) rescued the two robbers before they were executed.
San Francisco Chimalpa, located on highway between Naucalpan and Toluca in Mexico State,	Dec. 11, 2009	Julio César Luna Robles, 22, accused of raping a 13-year-old.	Local residents heard screams and seized the presumed culprit whom they sought to execute.	Poor area in urban Mexico State.	Police arrived in time to save the life of the alleged culprit.
Santiago Otolman, Otoumba, Mexico State	Dec. 8, 2009 (3:30 to 5:00 p.m.)	Neighbors captured two "suspicious" individuals parked outside a school.	The pair turned out to be police agents, Roberto Carlos Ordóñez Figueroa and Martín Suárez Martínez, who claimed to be seeking to arrest a child-molesting teacher. A crowd of 500 threatened, which blocked a nearby roadway, threatened to burn buses and execute the men (believed to be kidnappers) because they were "tired" of crime in their area.	Rural community outside the DF.	Some 200 specialized ASE elements used tear gas to rescue the officers.
Ecatzingo, Mexico State	November 28, 2009	Authorities held subjects believed to have kidnapped a resident of Morelos.	Crowd gathered outside the Subprocura-duría de Justicia de Amecameca to demand the release of the alleged abductors.		
San Matías Cuajingo, Juchitepec, Toluca, Mexico State	Nov. 10, 2009	Some 1,000 local residents believed that six men were responsible for kidnapping businessman José Trinidad Sánchez Rosas.	The citizens seized the presumed culprits, including two policemen, José Ricardo Velázquez Escárcega and Juan Carlos Ortega Vaca, doused them with gasoline with a view to burning them alive.	Poor community outside Toluca	The ASE intervened to prevent the <i>linchamiento</i> .
La Palma, Ixtlán de Juárez, Oaxaca	Sept. 3, 2009	Incited by local authorities, Catholics sought to execute 70 evangelical Christians, including 25 children.	This threat followed multiple acts against the Protestants, including the burning of a church on Aug. 31.		
Santa Cruz Otitlal, Santa Rita, Tlahuapan, Puebla	Aug. 17, 2009 (6 to 7 p.m.)	Police arrested two community members for being drunk: Agustín de Jesús Mónico, 20, and Pedro Nájera Contrera, 34.	Enraged at the arrests, local residents attacked authorities, injuring three policemen and breaking the windshield on the mayor's car.	Poor community.	Authorities began negotiations with local residents.
"Taxi Drivers Pact" in the DF's Magdalena Contreras borough	Aug. 14, 2009 (Night)	"El Perro," a criminal allegedly headed a band that assaulted and robbed taxi drivers.	El Perro's body was found in the trunk of a vehicle occupied by Ismael Quintero Oliver, 32, and Marcos Érik Pérez Mora, 21, who belonged to a "Drivers' Pact" committed to curbing crime against their colleagues.	Poor area of Mexico City.	Authorities took Quintero Oliver and Pérez Mora into custody.

Miguel Alemán, Oaxaca	Aug. 14, 2009 (5 a.m.)	Two men—Daniel Martínez Martínez, 19 and Dante Antonio Martínez Díaz—allegedly sexually abused a woman and her daughter.	Enraged taxi drivers beat up the suspects.	Poor neighbor-hood near Oaxaca city.	Municipal police intervened to save the suspects.
Galeana, Chihuahua	Spring 2009.	Benjamín LeBarón, leader of a small Mormon community, led the battle against organized crime, which included the kidnapping of LeBarón's nephew.	LeBarón was seeking to combat extortion and kidnappings carried out by drug cartels; he criticized the failure of authorities to protect their community of 5,000 residents, located 125 miles south of Cd. Juárez. He was kidnapped and murdered.		Following the July 7 killing of LeBarón and his brother-in-law, Gov. José Reyes Baeza pledged to arm and train 77 young men as policemen in the municipality; in the face of political pressure, he reneged on this promise, but dispatched additional state police to the area; LeBarón's brother said that local residents would support "SOS Chihuahua," an off-shoot of the national "SOS" organization founded by prominent businessman Alejandro Martí whose son was abducted and slain; meanwhile, Benjamín's uncle Adrián LeBarón avowed that absolutely no legal authority" existed in five Chihuahua municipalities which were in enthralled with organized crime: Nicolás Bravo, Gómez Farías, Zaragoza, Buenaventura, and Casas Grandes.
2009					
Jardines de Morelos and Rinconadas de Aragón, Ecatepec, Mexico State	Nov. 15, 2008	Three violent individuals suspected of robbing cars and houses.	Local residents seized two of the suspects whom they threatened to execute.	Neighbor-hood near DF.	Police arrested the suspects.
Sancto María Huexoculco, Chalco, Mexico State	Nov. 15, 2008	Residents caught three thieves and four police officers allegedly robbing electricity in their community.	The presumed culprits were taken to the center of the municipality and beaten.		Approximately 100 local and state police took the culprits into custody.
Tehuacán, Puebla	Nov. 14, 2008.	Isaías Castro, 40, believed to have molested a 4-year-old.	A mob seized and beat the alleged pedophile who died of cranial wounds on Nov. 14.		
DF borough of Benito Juárez	Nov. 14, 2008	Three assailants tried to steal a car from a female driver who screamed for help.	Two men in a BMW came to her help; others joined in capturing one of the suspects who was badly beaten.	Populated area near center of DF.	Police arrived to take the suspect into custody.
San Miguel Tejipan, Xochistlahuac, Costa Chica, Guerrero	Nov. 14, 2008	An intoxicated individual allegedly killed a man and his son.	Local residents pursued the suspect, doused his home with gasoline, and burned it, injuring his wife and daughter; next they lynched the presumed murderer.		
Yolotepec, Santiago de Anaya, Valle del Mezquital, Hidalgo	Nov. 14, 2008 (late night/early morning)	Approximately 10 drunk teenagers on a bus trip were surprised when breaking into stores that sold groceries and artisan goods; they also beat a shop owner and his wife and son.	Some 200 residents led by the municipal delegate Nicacio López Hernández threatened to stone the suspects and their companions; the bus driver suffered wounds.		Police rescued the captives after they reimbursed the shop owners 18,000 pesos for goods taken.
Pueblo Tejomulco el Bajo neighborhood of the DF's Xochimilco borough.	Oct. 25, 2008	A 70-year-old homeowner caught Victor Gallego Licona, 50, attempting to rob his home.	The victim of the crime and his neighbors tied the robber to a post and prepared to lynch him.	Poor community on DF's outskirts.	Elements of the DF's Ministry of Public Security arrived in time to prevent the execution.
Coatepec, Ixtapaluca, Mexico State	Oct. 1, 2008.	Six presumed criminals, two of whom were minors, tried to rob video games in a store.	More than 100 people beat the suspects and prepared to lynch them.		Sixty members of the ASE required to free the culprits.
San Juan Yautepetec, Huixquilucan, Mexico State	Sept. 4, 2008	Samuel Mejía Montoya, 18, was surprised inside a cyber-café where he allegedly was robbing computers.	Some 100 neighbors assembled in response to the pealing of local church bells and began to beat the teenager—with a view to lynching him; Feliberto Lopez, a local resident, exclaimed: "we are tired of robberies and criminals who go free."	Poor community on DF outskirts.	Some 30 ASE elements were required to prevent an execution.
Portes Gil, Santa Clara Ocuyucan	June 23, 2008	A violent dispute erupted over the judicial resolution of a land dispute in which the judge returned to the presumed owner 25 hectares occupied by 100 families.	Those living on the land spearheaded a protest, which involved the seizure of 89 people.	Poor, rural community	Municipal, metropolitan, and judicial police intervened to free the captives.
Querétaro	May 21, 2008	José Ruiz Zaragoza allegedly killed his wife in public.	A crowd caught and beat him.		The police arrived in time to take the suspect into custody.

Ecatepec, Mexico State	April 10, 2008	A man attempted to assault bus riders.	500 citizens attempted to execute the subject.	Suburb of Mexico City	100 local police saved the man from popular justice.
Metro Pantitlán, DF.	March 21, 2008	Two young men—Íván Rojas Ramírez, 20, and Luis Buendía Martínez, 22, suspected of robbing microbus passengers.	The passengers began to beat the culprits with a view to executing them.	Mexico City	Judicial police arrived in time to protect the suspects.
2004 and Earlier					
San Juan Ixtapopan in DF's Tláhuac borough	Nov. 23, 2004	Crowd became convinced that three men in an unmarked car outside a public school were preying on their children.	The men turned out to be detectives; even so, two were burned to death and the third badly beaten before a squad of riot police belatedly arrived on the scene.		Approximately 30 local residents, some captured on video cameras splashing gasoline on the two men, were arrested.
DF borough of Venustiano Carranza	April 23, 2002	Residents sought to lynch a 17-year-old surprised while attempting to rob a senior citizen's vehicle.	Police rescued him before he could be executed.		
San Pedro Mártir, Baja California	Jan. 19, 2002	Local citizens attempted to punish a young man accused of trying to rob a home.	Apparently he escaped from his captors.		
DF borough of Iztapalapa	Jan. 6, 2002	Local citizens tried to beat to death the 25-year-old driver of a vehicle who ran over two adolescents.	Apparently, he survived the attack.		
Pueblo de San Nicolás Tetelco, Oaxaca	Oct. 25, 2001	Residents almost lynched a man attempting to rob a house.	Preventive police rescued him.		
DF's Centro neighborhood	Oct. 15, 2001	Residents almost lynched a 30-year-old man who had wounded two senior citizens.	Apparently rescued by the police.		
Reforma community in Oaxaca city	Oct. 2, 2001	300 citizens sought to hang two judicial police for allegedly kidnapping a minor.	80 municipal, state, and judicial police saved the officers.		
DF's Centro neighborhood	Sept. 1, 2001	A thief tried to steal a Bible used for Mass at the La Santísima Church.	Police rescued the suspect as local people were beating him.		
San Miguel Topilejo in DF's Tlapan's borough	Aug. 13, 2001	Man surprised while robbing images from a chapel.	Police saved culprit from being lynched by local citizens.		
Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe	Aug. 4, 2001	Man attacked and robbed worshippers praying in the Basilica.	Judicial police saved him from worshippers who were beating him.		No arrests.
Magdalena Petacalco in DF borough of Tlalpan	July 25, 2001	Subject caught stealing objects from local Santa María Magdalena church.	Beaten so severely by local citizens that he died.		No arrests.

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